

Alaskans should take note of B.C. mines

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In the spirit of furthering the “important dialogue” that British Columbia Minister of Energy and Mines Bill Bennett encourages Alaskans to have with the B.C. government and mining interests, I am curious to get a better understanding of why Canadian taxpayers shelled out millions of dollars for restoration work at two mines mentioned by Minister Bennett in his recent opinion piece. (Juneau Empire, April 12)

According to the minister, B.C. spent over \$99 million to remediate the Britannia Mine site. Whether that figure is in Canadian dollars or U.S. dollars, it’s a rather large sum of taxpayer money. Perhaps someone in B.C.’s government did not require a sufficient restoration bond from the mine developer? Mr. Bennett states the mine closed in 1974. Have our Canadian neighbors inquired of their provincial government whether any of the executives of the mining corporations involved are still around and might reimburse the taxpayers for having paid to remediate the site?

Mr. Bennett also mentions that “with funding from our government,” the Tsolum River Restoration Society restored the Mount Washington Mine site so the river is “back to normal.”

Evidently Canadian salmon, just like our Alaskan ones, do not like swimming through the sulphuric acid that leaches from mine waste. One wonders just how “abnormal” the water quality was in the river from 1967 when the mine closed to 2014 when those 60,000 pinks and 2,500 cohos finally returned.

I realize that Canadians tend to be pretty mellow compared to their Alaskan counterparts. But I can only imagine that our neighbors to the east are not particularly pleased to be footing the bill for restoration efforts that, by any measure, should be paid for by the private corporations that reaped the benefits of the metals.

Regardless of which side of the border you are on, mining is a dirty industry with a dismal, shabby history of water pollution, a history that persists today at many sites. Alaska’s Department of Natural Resources should take careful note of the bills the citizens of B.C. have paid. In view of the budgetary woes we Alaskans are facing, the last thing the state needs is to be paying millions of dollars to repair our rivers and fish runs that private corporations have damaged.

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